



**U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas**

**Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney**

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**FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS THREE TEXAS SYNDICATE MEMBERS  
ON RACKETEERING CHARGES**

**United States Attorney Johnny Sutton** announced today that Texas Syndicate (TS) members Ernest Zubiato, 26, Michael Anthony Sanchez, 36, and Jose Rivera, 42, face up to life in federal prison after a jury convicted them of Federal racketeering and drug charges.

Testimony during the 8-day trial revealed that from the mid 1990's to 2003, the three men were members of a racketeering criminal enterprise involving murder, the distribution of illegal narcotics, extortion, counterfeiting and armed robbery. Among other charges related the three defendants on trial, the indictment charged that Sanchez, aka "50-50," was responsible for the murder of George Morales on July 12, 2000; and that Zubiato, aka "Neto," shot and killed Alex Lopez on July 15, 2001; both Morales and Lopez were killed because each had falsely claimed TS membership; and Joe Rivera solicited the murder of Jove Rios by other TS members on July 2, 2000 because the local TS feared that Rios would disclose TS secrets to rival gangs.

In all, 19 members of the Texas Syndicate have been convicted in this most recent investigation and are awaiting sentencing. From January 1998 to February 2003, the defendants conspired to distribute well over two hundred kilograms of cocaine per year in the Austin area.

"Tonight, Austinites can sleep a little bit easier knowing that these dangerous criminals are off the streets and won't be coming back," **stated United States Attorney Johnny Sutton**. "Today's conviction of three members of the Texas Syndicate, a violent Texas prison gang, is a great victory for the citizens of Austin. These three gang members were part of a violent criminal organization that operates both inside and outside the Texas prison system and specializes in the distribution of illegal drugs, armed robbery and murder."

Sutton noted that prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas have convicted over 50 members of the Texas Syndicate of serious federal crimes.

This case resulted from a two-year-long investigation conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Austin Police Department with assistance from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, U.S. Secret Service, Texas Board of Criminal Justice—Office of Inspector General, Travis County Sheriff's Office and the Texas Department of Public Safety. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Liz Cottingham and Ron Sievert and Special Assistant United States Attorney Gregg Cox of the Travis County District Attorney's Office.

The Texas Syndicate, also known as "Syndicato Tejano" and "ESE TE," originated during the 1970's.

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